

DISTORTION OF BILL EMERSON HUMANITARIAN TRUST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. NETHERCUTT) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. NETHERCUTT. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak tonight on an issue that deals with American agriculture. Today, as a member of the Committee on Appropriations and the Subcommittee on Agriculture, the House full committee passed a supplemental appropriations bill to assist our soldiers and military folks with respect to the prosecution of the war in Iraq, and provide other humanitarian aid and other financial assistance to the region of the Middle East and assist in the war effort there, and recognize the importance of supporting our fighting men and women in that theater.

Also, as part of the appropriations measure that passed the House Committee on Appropriations today, there was a provision that relates to food assistance for the people of Iraq, and a preparation for the understanding that our country has committed itself to try to help the people of the Middle East region, and certainly the people in Iraq, who are the innocent victims of a tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein.

I want to address a portion of the appropriations bill that deals with the agriculture commitment that the country has made in the supplemental appropriations bill.

It is a good measure. It is a supplemental that is supported by the President, by the majority party, by I think a unanimous vote in the Committee on Appropriations today, to provide assistance to the troops and make sure that our military receives all that it needs.

The section that I want to refer to in the appropriations bill that we will have a chance to debate and vote on later this week, and certainly in conference with the Senate, the other body, next week and hopefully to get this measure signed into law by the President before April 11, is a measure that has to do with the integrity of the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust.

Bill Emerson was a former Member, a wonderful man from Missouri, a dear friend and a colleague of many Members of Congress, who passed away; and the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust Fund was created in his memory, and properly so. That Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust was created to provide food aid on an emergency basis to countries around the world who are struggling for food in times of emergency and dire straits and national consequence.

Our country has been very forthright in providing this assistance and making sure that the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust is not only stocked with adequate commodities, but also cash to purchase commodities when the need arises; and it has done millions and millions of people a world of good in

making sure that they are able to eat. And it is out of the goodness of the American taxpayer and the American system that we provide that assistance.

What we have seen in the use of the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, administered by the Department of Agriculture in our country, is what I perceive to be a distortion of the operation of the trust. About a year ago, last summer in fact, there was a determination made by USDA to sell onto the open market soft white wheat, which is manufactured, grown, produced in my part of the country, the State of Washington. In doing so, the actions by the U.S. Department of Agriculture depressed the price on the open market of soft white wheat. Over the course of the last few months, since November, additional efforts have been undertaken by USDA to sell wheat stocks, soft white wheat stocks, in anticipation of humanitarian needs around the world.

In the most recent activity in the trust, there has been a move by USDA to monetize soft white wheat in order to obtain cash, which would then be used to buy other commodities, rice and others, which may be useful in Iraq.

Now, I have no quarrel with the idea that we need to provide food aid to Iraq. This is a war-torn country with people starving at the hands of Saddam Hussein. America, as it has in the past, is ready at the present to provide assistance to the people of Iraq. So it is not an issue with me over how or whether we should provide food aid to the people of Iraq.

There is an issue as to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's operation, administration of the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust.

What we have seen is the monetization of soft white wheat at the expense of the farmers who grow soft white wheat and at the expense of the market which is driven by the amount of wheat that is on the market at any one time. The price of wheat, we have seen in my farm country, has gone from \$4.80 cents a bushel in November to a range of about \$3.15 cents to \$3.25 cents per bushel currently. The market collapsed to a no-bid market on March 21, just a week or so ago, on the rumor that the Department of Agriculture was going to dump more wheat on the market and raise cash for other commodities.

What my admonition to the USDA has been is, do not monetize soft white wheat so you can buy other commodities. Let us make sure, as we face the needs of the people of Iraq and the humanitarian commitment that our country is willing and able to make, let us make sure this is a wartime cost which is necessary to assist people in other parts of the world who may be facing disasters, natural or otherwise.

So what we are trying to do is make sure that the USDA, number one, follows the intent of the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, and that the process

is in place to do so in a fair manner, commodity to commodity, around the country, and not place a monetization practice in place which then puts soft white wheat farmers, for example, at odds with rice growers in different parts of the country.

So the monetization prohibition, which I think is sensible for our government to operate and administer the food aid programs of our country, is part of the appropriations bill that passed in the Committee on Appropriations today and will be before the House of Representatives, most likely later this week. So that is one restriction that needs to be in place. And the Department of Agriculture must listen to this development which has been undertaken by the House, by the legislative branch of our government, and not do more monetization, not undertake more monetization of one commodity which places farmers which grow that commodity against farmers of another commodity that may be suitable for distribution in Iraq.

In addition, the House has put \$69 million additional food aid money, unrestricted, able to have any commodity on the market be purchased, to meet the needs of the people of Iraq; and that is an acceptable and appropriate activity development on the part of the Committee on Appropriations and this House and the legislative branch.

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It is likely to stay in the bill all the way through the process in dealing with the other body as well as the reconciliation with the House conferees to come up with a final supplemental appropriations package that will assist in the war effort, including humanitarian aid assistance.

I am here, Mr. Speaker, to emphasize most definitively that monetization of commodity that places one grower against another is bad agriculture policy in this country. It is a disservice to the agriculture community, which is struggling for price support and market price in any event; and it puts farmer against farmer, which is an unacceptable condition. In addition, the misuse, I would argue, of the Bill Emerson humanitarian trust to assist in Iraq when additional moneys are being poured into the war effort as part of the defense bill, as part of the supplemental appropriations bill to assist those good people of Iraq who need the assistance from food aid, there is no need to further monetize or further distort the market for soft white wheat or rice or any other commodity that is subject to administration under the Bill Emerson humanitarian trust.

The third point I want to raise is that in depressing the market by government action, which puts more commodities on the market and lowers the price of any commodity, what we are doing is then under the loan deficiency payment program of the farm bill, the agriculture policy in this country, what it is doing is subjecting the taxpayer to additional expense by virtue

of that market price going down below the loan deficiency payment level that then kicks in so that there is more taxpayer assistance to farmers because of that low price. My strong point and my strong message to USDA is the U.S. Department of Agriculture should not be taking actions which depress the price which then expose the taxpayer to other liability in aid to the farmer. Instead, let the market decide what the commodities market price should be. And so when you monetize and sell one commodity to buy another, you distort the market, and that is what USDA in my opinion has been doing and doing improperly.

I come to the floor tonight to make this very strong message to USDA and any others of the eight government agencies who are involved in the decision to monetize soft white wheat. This is bad policy. We should not be doing it, especially in light of the prohibition on monetization that exists in the current House appropriations bill that passed the Appropriations Committee today and will likely come to this House floor sometime this week, hopefully, and then be reconciled with the other body's version of the supplemental appropriations bill and then be signed by the President most likely at the end of next week.

I am urging caution on the part of the USDA. I have had conversations with the agency. I have had conversations with USAID to try to make the point that help is on the way in terms of money and prohibition on monetization; and my great hope is that the agencies of government who are committed to helping the agriculture industry in this country, the farmers who grow the products that you and I consume, that there will be some restraint on the part of the USDA, that there will be a cancellation of any other notices to monetize soft white wheat so that rice can be purchased, because there is additional money in the pipeline that is going to be coming to the rice growers of the country or the wheat growers of the country to provide the commodity needs that will meet the expectations and the requirements of the people who are suffering in Iraq.

We have 69 million additional dollars. We have \$250 million for PL-480 assistance. There is additional money that will help the poor, starving people of this war-torn region. We will do that and we should do that but not at the expense of the commodity growers in the eastern district of Washington State or other States around the country who are affected by a misuse or mismanagement or a distorting impact that comes with monetizing the Bill Emerson humanitarian trust.

I will be pursuing this issue in due course to make sure that the U.S. Department of Agriculture agencies understand the consequences of monetization, the impact on the markets and the impact on the taxpayer. Ultimately, the taxpayers when prices go

way down in the soft white wheat market are going to have to bear the burden. That is not what the farmer wants. The farmer wants a market price. We had a market price of \$4.80 a bushel some several months ago but because of, in part, additional dumping on the market of U.S. Government agency stocks, the price has gone down, and we now have a further crisis in farm country.

We cannot afford to lose the agriculture infrastructure in this Nation. If prices are so low that farmers are not going to grow commodities, we are going to find ourselves in days and months and years ahead, hopefully not, we are going to find ourselves facing the challenge of being independent agriculturally. We are going to be dependent on other countries of the world for our agriculture. That is unacceptable, and that is what we are trying to prevent by allowing market forces to have an important part in agriculture policy, not a distorting impact because of determinations made by USDA, our own Agriculture Department, which has the mission to help the farmers and the food needs of people in this country.

I would just say, too, as we look at the dependence that we have on fossil fuels, on oil from the Middle East countries, we are now in a war that has as a factor in it the issue of oil reserves and who is producing oil reserves. We are dependent on foreign countries. We cannot allow that to happen in America as it relates to our dependence on agriculture commodities from overseas. That is why we need a robust agriculture economy here and proper administration of the Bill Emerson trust, the humanitarian trust, proper administration of the food aid programs, proper respect for agriculture interests and the value of markets and the value of the movement of markets, prices go up and down; but let the markets operate what the prices are rather than have the government be involved in distorting the market. If we have a hands-off policy or a helpful policy, as opposed to a hurtful policy by our U.S. Department of Agriculture, we will be a lot better off.

I would say to the Speaker and my colleagues, be on the lookout for any market distortion that might be coming out of government agencies as it relates to agriculture, and I urge my colleagues to support this idea that monetization is not a good thing when you are trying to put farmer against farmer by our own Department of Agriculture, because the goal ultimately is to have a robust agriculture economy providing enough food so that we can continue to provide assistance to natural disaster consequences and the people who are subject to natural disasters or food shortages or drought or any other consequence that comes around this great world, that America can help solve by providing food aid.

COMMEMORATING THE BIRTH OF CESAR CHAVEZ, AMERICAN LABOR LEADER

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURGESS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I want to take time tonight as chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to pay tribute to an inspiring and beloved man, Cesar Estrada Chavez. Cesar Chavez, 76 years ago this Monday, marked the beginning of his life dedicated to improving the quality of life for all Americans. We honor and pay respect to a man who brought awareness of the labor injustices to the national light and helped pave the path to educating people about the importance of the plight of the working individuals in the fields of this country. He cleared the way for progress and opportunity. Tonight, we have here members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus; and I want to make tribute to one of our members, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GRIJALVA), and ask him to say a few words in behalf of Cesar Chavez.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Texas for the opportunity to come and speak today. It is my honor to rise today in this House to acknowledge the birth date of Cesar Chavez. Yesterday would have been his 76th birthday. Cesar Chavez, cofounder, along with Dolores Huerta, of the United Farm Workers' Union, led a historic struggle to give voice to the voiceless and empower the poor and powerless, inspiring a people beyond the limits and barriers that had been artificially placed before them.

Cesar Chavez was born and died in the district that I represent, in Yuma and San Luis, Arizona. It is vital that all Americans acknowledge the profound contributions that Cesar Chavez has made to our country. These contributions were not in the form of money, false praise, or the trappings of power. He reinforced the values of this Nation, values such as commitment and of purpose and strength of cause.

Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to quote directly from Cesar Chavez: "In this world, it is possible to achieve great material wealth, to live an opulent life. But a life built upon those things alone leaves a shallow legacy. In the end, we will be judged by other standards."

Another value that Cesar imparted and reinforced for our country is the value of struggle and perseverance. Again let me quote Cesar Chavez: "When we are really honest to ourselves, we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us, so it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving life do we find life, that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally nonviolent struggle for justice. To be a man or woman is to suffer for